

English Teacher Learning for New Times: Digital Video Composing as Multimodal Literacy Practice¹

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Over the past two decades, technological and cultural contexts have produced a shift in the notion of literacy from the conventional sense of reading and writing *only* print text to an enlarged sense of reading and writing multiple forms of non-print “texts,” as well (e.g., IRA, 2001; NCTE, 2003). In this expanded view, more than ever, literacy is plural: “reading” and “writing” include *literacies* or *multiliteracies* (New London Group, 1996), that is, producing and understanding multiple, representational forms deeply rooted in new social contexts and practices (or ways of creating and using “texts”).

The field of New Literacy Studies brings together thinking across several disciplines to expand the notion of literacy to *literacy practices* that are embedded in social relationships and differ as enacted across time and space (Gee, 1990, 2003; Street, 1995; also Heath, 1983). In this sociocultural approach, literacy is not singular, “autonomous” or neutral (Street, 1995), but rather contextually purposeful and shaped by power issues and identities.

In this article, I examine the meaning of these shifting notions of literacy for English education, drawing on my work in a long-term digital video composing project and an ELA teacher education class, to look at teachers’ engagements with this newly accessible multimodal literacy practice. I argue that English teachers need support for new kinds of embodied multimodal learning in order to be prepared for teaching students in 21st century classrooms.

Multimodal Literacy Practice for New Times

The digital affordances (resources) and dynamics of the wired world have influenced how most of us work, think, live, and communicate: daily life in

the Western World most often includes use of email, instant messaging, voicemail, and Internet web-pages with image, voice, and music mixed with print. The “new landscape of communication” (Kress, 2000, p. 183) is marked by the emergence of domains besides language at the center of everyday communication—particularly multimodalities such as images, music, and body movements. As texts are now widely constituted through more than one mode or means of representation, the literacy practices needed for functioning in the world have been and still are rapidly transforming (Leu, 2002).

Especially for the “Millennial Generation” (Hagood, Stevens & Reinking, 2002)—youth born after 1981—reality includes new literacies embedded in these new technologies (Alvermann, 2002; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). “Millennials” have grown up surrounded and shaped by practices related to computers, the Internet, and mobile phones (arguably a portable computing device for communicating, taking pictures, playing music and games, word processing, storing information). As a significant part of youth culture, these everyday tools and artifacts bind adolescents together in a

social culture through communication and meaning making. Increasingly, the millennial generation, immersed in popular and online cultures, thinks of messages and meanings *multimodally*—not just in terms of printed words, but also in terms of images and music.

In response to these changes, the New Literacies Group at the University at Buffalo, has conducted seminars and research examining the meaning of these shifting notions of literacy for the preparation of English language arts teachers. Specifically, the group has developed the concept of Multimodal Literacy Practice (Miller, Thompson & Boyd, in review) to provide a theoretical framework to inform new multimodal pedagogies for what some call “New Times” (Luke & Elkins, 1998, p. 6). Multimodal Literacy Practice reframes pedagogical goals to focus on connecting out-of-school literacies of students through purposeful multimodal design activities in social spaces that engage student lifeworlds and transform classroom learning.

Such pedagogies are necessary because the new times of digitally accessible multimodality for designing texts is part of evolving social purposes and practices. A startling consensus has formed among scholars: facility with interpreting and designing multimodal literacies will increasingly be required by human beings to communicate, work, and thrive in the digital, global world of the 21st century (Alvermann, 2002; Buckingham, 2003; Cope

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& Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 2003, 2004; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Miller, in press; New London Group, 1996; Swenson et al., 2006). Further, the perspectives of business/workplace interests (SCANS, 1991), Department of Education assessments (1999), and unique partnerships of education, business and government leaders (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006) converge with scholars and researchers: most students urgently need opportunities in schools to develop new literacies, performance knowledge, and multimodal learning strategies required for new times and social futures. In short, traditional schooling and literacy are not adequate for the 21st century public, civic, and workplace spheres. Significant changes will be needed in schooling, in teachers, and, especially, in educational beliefs about the status/design of non-print and print-mixed modes as ways of knowing and communicating.

Needed in Schools/by ELA Teachers: Performance Knowledge and Design

If essential multimodal literacies are to enter classrooms as powerful learning tools that enable new ways of knowing, literacy practices in schools must expand. The current approaches of “institutions of old learning” that prepare students for life and work in the print-only industrialized world of the past are insufficient (O’Brien & Bauer, 2005). The gap between new multimodal literacy practices and print-based schooling has been called “the digital divide and disconnect” (O’Brien & Bauer, 2005, p. 126) and helps to explain the increasing student disengagement now found in classrooms (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005). Integrating the dramatic broadening of purposeful literacy to include multimodal meaning-making beyond print-only texts for all students and their teachers is an essential task for schools and schools of education in the 21st century (Miller & Borowicz, 2006).

Restrictive school practices of literacy have been characterized by a bias for printed factual knowledge, recitation, the structured expository essay, and the student practice of scanning for textbook answers (King & O’Brien, 2002; also Anyon, 1997; Finn, 1999). This “deep grammar of schooling” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) foregrounds the view of knowledge as propositional claims held/provided by the teacher and supplied to the student to be committed to memory. Such a belief may account for the relatively superficial changes technologies have brought to schools (e.g., word processing and presentation tools).

As research illustrates, a recurring problem with teachers’ uses of new technologies in classrooms is inattention to multimodal design and new ways

of knowing (e.g., Leu, Kinz, Coiro & Cammack, 2004, p. 1600; Miller, in press). In teacher education, opportunities for teachers to transform their roles, knowledge, and beliefs—especially their views on what counts as literacy and evidence of learning should be provided (Koehler & Mishra, 2005; Leu et al., 2004; Miller et al., 2003).

New Ways of Knowing

One important consequence of the intense proliferation of knowledge in the digital age is the continued transformation of notions of *knowing* (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). The status of propositional knowledge, or knowledge that already “exists” in statements, has inalterably changed. In the context of a superabundance of digitally accessible informational “texts,” no one can “know” all there is to know in the world. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) suggest that most essential is *performance knowledge*—knowing *how* to find, gather, use, communicate, and create new ways of envisioning assemblages of knowledge.

The dramatic change to “knowing as an ability to perform” understanding rather than remembering facts (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 173) emphasizes that meaning-making is an active and dynamic process that includes *orchestrating representational (multimodal) resources and their interconnection*—that is, includes *design*. The multimodal meaning-making systems available include the potential of orchestrating linguistic, visual, gestural, audio, and spatial elements dynamically to communicate (New London Group, 2000, p. 26). Kress (2003) distinguishes between the resources of language—which is a time-based, sequentially organized mode—and images—which are space-based and simultaneously organized. For that reason, people in the 21st century may need competence with mixing these modes—that is, with *designing*. According to Jewitt and Kress (2003), design also refers to how people make use of the resources that are available at a given moment in a specific communicational environment to realize their interests as makers of a message/text. Teachers, though, tend to under-use these resources of multimodality because of an unconscious (sometimes conscious) print bias. Direct attention to the orchestration of multiple modes—to designing—in teacher preparation is a promising approach to this problem (e.g., Miller, in press; Shanahan, 2006).

Teaching “Digital Natives”

As a result of the “social and cultural revolution” ushered in by new technologies (Grabill & Hicks, 2005), more students who are “digital natives”

(Prensky, 2001) arrive at school more competent in multimodal literacy practices than their teachers (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack, 2004, p. 1599). Instead of drawing on students' facility with new literacies in school learning, most schools' "preference for print may preclude teachers from even noticing their students' competence with multi- and digital literacies" (King & O'Brien, 2002, p. 41).

From one perspective, teachers are largely "outsiders," often baby boomers who have grown up, studied, and worked in a print-only world, while current students are largely "insiders" who are growing up in a digital world of new multimodal literacies where, for example, the Internet with its print-mixed web pages has always existed (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). To integrate new beliefs about knowledge and literacies into classrooms, teacher educators need to take seriously the notion of "teachers first" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p.67), and provide new teachers with opportunities to learn new multi-modal literacies for their own authentic purposes with support for their ongoing needs before they can effectively use them as student learning tools in their classrooms. The necessary initial step, then, is for teachers to develop performance knowledge through design themselves and, thereby, more readily develop deeper understanding of the wired world of the digital age, where knowledge is multimodal, co-constructed, and performed or represented, not absorbed. If English language arts teachers are to become insiders in such multimodal design practices, they need supported professional development opportunities in ELA teacher education programs and in schools. I examine the experiences of teachers learning digital video composing as a multimodal literacy practice in an urban school project and an ELA teacher education class.

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A Teacher Education Course: Designing Digital Video as Multimodal Literacy Practice

Why Digital Video Composing?

For the past seven years, I have been working in collaboration with the Buffalo City School District to help develop new multimodal literacy practices with teachers and their students. The City Voices, City Visions Digital Video Composing Project² provides an intensive 28-hour Professional Development

Institute that prepares urban teachers to use digital video design and production as a literacy and learning tool for students in grades 5–12. So far, the funded project has placed digital technologies into classrooms for use by 150 teachers and their students, providing them with ongoing collaborative support in their classrooms and ongoing professional development activities through regular reunions. This kind of long-term partnership is a key component to a systems approach to school change (Miller et al., 2003) and allows for the joint evolution of the project based on both promising approaches developed by teachers and findings from research in project classrooms.

Digital video (DV) composing provides a potential solution to the problem of teachers' under-using affordances of new multimodal literacies (e.g., Miller, in press; Shanahan, 2006): DV composing requires integration of many modes—what some call “an integrative, combinatorial assemblage of modes” (Burn & Parker, 2003, p. 59). In DV composing, the designers plan for visual images and audio narrative on a storyboard; shoot video of located scenes and student depictions with the DV camera; import the footage into the computer software (iMovie or MovieMaker), and then edit images and sounds into a coherent text by cutting, pasting, and manipulating—much like word processing. Even advanced transition, visual, text, and sound effects are available through drop and drag menus, thus providing opportunities for polished-looking products from beginners. In short, digital video composing is

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a quintessential multimodal literacy that allows orchestration of visual, aural, kinetic, and verbal modes electronically. Digital video makes it difficult to stay in the comfort zone of print-only texts because editing DV footage requires integrating print on screen with a visual and two separate audio tracks (often one for music and one for narration). When teachers engage in de-

sign-based performances, they have the *embodied experience* of engaging in purposeful orchestration of modes to create meaning. Digital video composing can provide that experience.

Digital video composing is a real-world practice about which most people have extensive implicit knowledge through their viewing of films and television. Cope & Kalantzis (2000) recommend situating or contextualizing literacy practices through immersion in experiences with designs of meaning that make “intuitive sense” to learners because they do regularly appear in realms outside of school (p. 244) (unlike the school-bound five-paragraph essay). Digital video composing is potentially a high-status

social and cultural practice with powerful attention-getting qualities and expert versions in the real world. The connection to youth media culture (music videos, movies, vlogs, clip culture⁵) is strong, making it a high-interest endeavor that can draw on student explicit and implicit out-of-school knowledge about effective communication in video. Use of familiar media genres for DV composing (e.g., ads, music videos, movie trailers) creates another school connection to the media-rich sphere of youth culture.

Ethnographic and case-study research in City Voices, City Visions (CVCV) project classrooms provides evidence that in DV composing urban students often became “active designers of meaning” (New London Group, 2000). Using hand-sized digital video cameras and movie making software (such as iMovie or MovieMaker) as tools for multimodal thinking and understanding fosters student agency and engagement as learners *and* higher school achievement, including success on the state high-stakes writing tests (Borowicz, 2005; Costello, 2006; Lauricella, 2006; Miller, in press; Miller & Borowicz, 2005, 2006). (For more information on the CVCV project, go to the website at <http://www.cityvoicescityvisions.org>).

Digital Video Composing as Literacy Learning: The Class

Out of these project experiences, I developed a teacher education course—Digital Video Composing as Literacy Learning Tool—which has now been taken by 95 pre-service and in-service teachers seeking their master’s degrees and professional certifications. The course explores the uses of specific genres of digital video (DV) composing to meet learning standards in the secondary English classroom (Grades 5-12). The class was an effort to develop multimodal literacy dispositions and practices in teachers who may well be in the classroom until the mid-21st century. As researchers, my colleague Suzanne Borowicz and I examined if and how these teachers might transform their notions of literacy and learn to infuse digital video composing into curriculum and instruction (Miller & Borowicz, 2007). Additionally, we wanted to see if and how *their* students had opportunities to design their understanding of literature, language, media, and social issues related to the ELA topics they studied. Goals for the DV class included developing rationale for expanding traditional views of literacy and engaging preservice and inservice teachers (hereafter called teachers) in a range of composing activities. They engaged in creative writing, dramatic readings, visualization, movement, process drama, and music as they planned and produced digital videos related to the English Language Arts curriculum in progressively more complex genres: I-Speak (visualizing a dramatically performed

text); poetry videos (interpretation of their own or published poems, based on knowledge of music videos); *uncommercials*⁴ (selling a concept/theme—“Symbolism: Priceless”); movie trailers (promoting short stories and novels “coming to a theatre near you”); and news segment inquiry (e.g., *20/20*, E!true Hollywood). (For an example, see a teacher’s poetry interpretation of “Introduction to Poetry” by Billy Collins at <http://cvcvenglish.blogspot.com/>).

Within the context of the ELA curriculum, the teachers worked individually and collaboratively on the design and creation of these digital video projects in a digital video workshop. At the same time, frequent discussion prompted them to become metacognitive about their own composing activities to develop the argument for using such activity in their own classrooms. To that end, they read and reflected in writing and orally discussed the relevant theory and practical application literature about multimodal literacy integration and critical media literacy to re-examine the relationship of DV composing to literacy learning, student achievement, and society (e.g., Alvermann, 2002; Goodman, 2003; in later classes, Miller & Borowicz, 2006). Finally, teachers developed a digital video project for their own students and enacted it in their classrooms as an inquiry into what happens when students engage in DV composing as part of the ELA curriculum. Preservice teachers paired with practicing teachers as collaborators in the classroom for this project. Finally, start-up of those inquiries provided opportunities to discuss the tensions and politics in schools and to develop professional strategies for working in those spaces. (We assume a situation where a teacher can come up with the minimum equipment—one mini-DV camera and one computer per classroom—though some schools had computer labs available.)

I focus on several teachers, primarily on the experiences of five practicing teachers and a preservice teacher (Dora, Terry, Jackson, Manny, and Cory [all names are pseudonyms]) who changed in particularly interesting ways that demonstrate possibilities for DV composing as a bridge to new ways of knowing—and to school change.

Struggling with Expanding Literacy

Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the ELA teachers in the classes were caught in the traditional notion of reading and writing printed text as the only legitimate form of school literacy, the form that had brought them success in school. Most said they took the class to become more proficient with technology, to “keep up” with their students’ technological knowledge, or to

learn something technologically new. Initially their interests were in technology's utilitarian benefits: "It's so much better to have students type their papers instead of struggling through their handwriting." Or they liked "the ease of finding information for research through the Internet."

The initial response in each class was anxiety that teachers' hard-won knowledge about print-text was antiquated, even though the class focused on DV interpretations of print texts and mixing print with other modes. Most teachers raised concerns about what should count as English. Cory, a pre-service teacher searching for a job explained: "As an English teacher a year ago, I thought I would never use multimedia texts to study. After all, is that English? That's not the way I remember it." The idea of print literature as an almost sacred text emerged. In her first class reflection Terry, a twenty-something first-year teacher in a private college-prep high school for boys, spoke of her worries about technology:

The English classroom was, in my eyes, supposed to be a haven devoid of modernity, save the modern relevance of classical literature that we would broach in thoughtful *discussion*, certainly not in any technological forum. I perceived technology to be a degradation and reduction of the sanctity of classical literature and the critical thinking requisite to understanding and enjoying it.

At the outset, for some members of the class, computers represented technologies that were antithetical to literature and English, in Terry's words, "a degradation."

Another fear some teachers faced was loss of control, especially loss of their position as the knowledge expert in the classroom. Some, like Dora, an 8th grade teacher in a suburban school, were afraid of not knowing how to use the technologies. During the first class while learning to "drag and drop" a video clip, I saw her put up both hands defensively, saying, "I can't do this." Later she reflected, "Initially I had to overcome my own neurosis and understand that this facet of my education might cause me to relinquish some of my normally tightly guarded control . . . Perhaps I was a technophobe." In short, some of the teachers struggled with reservations and with unfamiliarity and lack of proficiency with the tools.

The class focus, though, was on multimodal literacies (not just on learning to drive new technologies) and on preparing students for life and work in the 21st century. Over time as Dora read, responded, discussed, and created her movies on high-stakes testing, female body images, and sexual pressures in teens, she reframed her vision of existing uses and new possibilities

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for multimodal literacies. She began to see computer use as a “social activity” responsible for students’ “shared micro culture,” constituted as they talked to each other every night through Instant Messaging, “using computers and asking questions of digital friends and sources.” That is, she saw the literacy practices rather than just the tools. When she took the newly discovered school mini-DV camera out of the case, students gathered around her desk and one said, “Sweet, you have night vision.” They showed her more about using the camera than she had learned. From that moment, she started to see new potentials for DV composing in her classroom.

Expanding Notions of Literacy

As part of the class, teachers initiated a DV composing project with their own students and conducted an inquiry into their own students’ engagement and learning. Dora came to see digital video composing as active, social learning that would keep students “thinking, moving, doing.” Cory collaborated with Dora in her 8th grade class as a co-inquirer when her students created poetry videos. The DV process footage they produced from that class demonstrates that both of them circulated, teaching at points of need, in an energized digital video composing workshop.

The potential for digital video production as a multimodal literacy practice seemed to emerge most profoundly as teachers began to see it as a composing activity, similar to writing text, but often more engaging for them. Dora explained how editing her movie felt very familiar as literacy *process and practice*:

I needed an introduction, body and conclusion. I had to proofread and spellcheck, speed up some footage, slow down some other. My process of creating a final product, asked me to use a critical lens on myself, scrutinize my work, spatially, musically, socially, emotionally, and technically. . . . [I remember] the absolute rapture, eyes fixated to our computer screens. . . . The process of DV production is the same one we teach year after year in its shadowy paper version.

Through such digital video composing experiences, novice teachers (and then their students) may create new images of themselves and begin to broaden their notions of school literacy *from only* reading and writing print *to also* composing visual and auditory “texts” addressing issues related to their readings of literature—ranging from family feuds and friendship to teen identity and violence.

Transforming Notions of Knowing

A key goal of the digital video class was to help create connections between the teachers' newly forming knowledge/beliefs and their pedagogical goals and actions. This was a major aim of teachers' inquiries into digital video composing in their own classrooms. In general, they found that students became more active readers and composers as they pursued their own understandings through digital video composing. In orchestrating the visual, music, and narrative for a poetry video, for example, the teachers and their students performed their knowing; it was dynamic, evolving, and constructed. Curriculum concepts such as perspective and theme became knowledge-in-action (Applebee, 1996), learned in the context of orchestrating multimodal meaning. Teachers and students participating in knowledge creation saw purpose and agency in their work. These findings were similar to those in the CVCV project where urban students who had been alienated from academic literacy appropriated media images for reuse and redesign, connected curriculum to their lives outside school, and redefined themselves as intense social producers of meaning (e.g., Miller & Borowicz, 2005, 2006; Miller, in press).

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Trying to understand *how* such changes occurred when digital video composing was approached as a multimodal literacy practice led to the following key themes: the fundamental social nature of DV designing, the necessary shifting of teacher roles, the drawing on student lifeworlds (Holland et al., 1998) to grow new school identities, and the focused attention on curriculum in the flow experience of DV design.

The Flow of Multimodal Design

In the digital video class, the teachers engaged in digital video production, first in teams and then alone, and in the process learned much more than how to use the camera and editing program and/or to better understand their topic. Their "intent participation" (Rogoff, 2003) in digital video production was pervasive among the teachers and, in turn, in their students. This "flow" experience, in which time slips by when attention and action join to focus completely on a "coherent future whole" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), appears to be part of what led to teacher change. Bringing their intense attention to making meaning of literature and communicating effectively, digital video producers learned deeply—both consciously and through

more tacit “incidental learning,” which is characteristic of all arts production (Heath, 2004).

For example, Cory suggested the importance of what he called the “authentic practice” of composing through digital video with a special kind of teacher’s attention during non-required weekend editing sessions:

We became filthy with editing on Saturdays in the computer labs. The garbage can was often times full with empty bags of chips and bottles of Pepsi, evidence of the work being done, the time it took to sculpt our projects into something that would resemble what we saw in our minds. Every step of the way towards a finished—though beautifully imperfect—video production was cause for constant awareness of what we were actually *doing*. After all, we were not just training to be users of digital video, but instructors of it, teachers of literacy through the digital video processes.

This “sustained visual focus” (Heath, 2004) helps to explain how knowledge is created through the mental action of those involved in the high-demand work of all the arts; its creators engage by “looking and thinking, seeing and planning, viewing and responding . . . they review (often quite literally re-viewing) . . . they also reflect (sometimes trying to re-create what they have seen) on past observations and project ahead to their planned performance or production” (Heath, 2004, p. 339). The teachers in the DV classes “think into the future” not only through the digital video process of segmenting the digital video project into pieces (shots, scenes) and composing them into the “coming [digital video] whole,” but also by developing understanding (both consciously and tacitly) of the mental and physical habits their students would need, to produce their own knowledge-in-action through digital video. Their reflective writings about these experiences demonstrated attention to their thinking in strong active verbs—I decided; I opted; I wanted; I chose images—suggesting metacognitive planning of meaning making. These phrases and concepts were used repeatedly as the language of their generative thinking process grounded in the commitment to the end product. As they came to understand the intense attention that digital video/knowledge production promotes/requires, they had the opportunity to examine strategies and processes to understand what literacies were involved.

As a result of this composing, Emily, one of Dora’s 8th grade students, saw the world in a different way: “I learned a lot from this project. It further developed my knowledge of poetry terms. I learned how to make a movie. . . . Poetry doesn’t have to be boring. It is everywhere.” Emily’s re-seeing of poetry provides another rationale for DV composing as an important multimodal bridge: as students orchestrate visuals and music and printed

text (on-screen and in narration) in DV composing, the process creates an embodied link from print to lived experience. In profound ways, students may develop new eyes with which to see the world, possibly suddenly seeing poetry “everywhere.”

Shifting Social Stances

During production, teachers began to see themselves as members of a collaborative learning community. Jackson, a high school English teacher in the class with some prior digital video experience, found it “empowering” to “assist other students [other teachers] in their time of need.” Even when some students in the final project made a DV on their own, they always turned to members of the class with questions, to solicit actors, to share a shot, or to comment on someone’s choice of music.

In their schools, these teachers negotiated changes needed to infuse digital video production as a fundamentally social activity—whether they had leaned toward this approach in their teaching beforehand or not. All appropriated the idea of creating production *teams* for use with their own grade 5–12 students. They enlisted aid in their buildings—from planning, searching out equipment, asking parents’ permission and support to seeking assistance from other people in the building who were more tech savvy, satisfying the curiosities of other teachers and administrators about the excitement in the building, sharing and changing roles with students, and culminating with the social pleasure of joint viewing and commentary.

These screenings provided another social opportunity to “read” digital video texts as a class. Students drew on their developing knowledge about the affordances and limitations of modes in DV and also on their implicit knowledge of what works as a multimodal message. These were highly energized events, with students actively watching, appreciating, and critiquing. Teachers supported conversations to focus attention on both design elements and curricular concepts. Most often, these were fused in the movie—the excellent close-up shot that captured the concept; the color and floating of the print text that emphasized the meaning of the poetic line. Manny writes,

DV [Digital video] is a true community builder within the classroom To complete this project, the students had to be *committed* to the task;

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they had to *trust* the advice of others; they had to be *accepting* of each other's strengths and weaknesses; and, most of all, they had to be *mindful* of each others' contributions.

Teachers learned what could not be *directly* taught, but had to be learned through reflection on direct experience—the *felt*, the *tacit* knowledge-in-action of the importance of community and collaboration, of flow and agency, of new social stances and multimodal meaning. To orchestrate such learning environments in schools, teachers need to have these experiences themselves in their teacher education classes.

Shifting Teacher Roles

The degree of involvement of teachers using DV with their students varied, but in every classroom there was evidence that teacher roles shifted in meaningful ways. Video shot for their teacher inquiry projects during their own students' digital video production illustrated a striking role change for the teacher in the classroom. After teachers planned and introduced the DV composing task and formed production teams, their classes unfolded in a studio atmosphere where some students filmed and others fine-tuned storyboards, viewed footage, or edited visuals, music, narration. Teachers shifted to a more collaborative instructional role, monitoring and assisting where needed. Describing her role, Dora said she “circulated the room offering advice and camera angles.” In his senior class, Jackson acted as a “technical troubleshooter, [and] on the producer side, I traveled throughout the groups and questioned aspects of their projects in order to push them towards more sophisticated thinking.” Besides the mediation (Vygotsky, 1978) of their peers, the tools (camera, storyboard, editing program), and prior knowledge (of video genres, of life experiences), students needed the support of their teachers to pose a question, make a suggestion, provide a response—in context and at the point of need. This kind of interactive teaching (which it seems is much promoted and not so often used) was prevalent in these classrooms during DV composing activities.

Based on her digital video experiences, Dora was also able to create a new role for herself as change agent in the school. She communicated effectively to parents in writing about how her plan to have her students *compose* digital video was congruent with the goals of her English class. Dora created such a buzz in her school that, as a second year teacher, she was asked to give the faculty a presentation on using digital video composing as a learning tool in the classroom. Engaging in the collaborative, flow experience of digital video composing and recursive reflection on its processes helped Dora

develop a strong rationale for this innovation and a new role as a professional who could contribute to change in the school.

Attention to Lifeworlds and Identity-Making

In their classroom inquiries, teachers found that digital video composing caused students to participate more actively in class. Students shifted to lively engagement on production teams and developed a sense of agency in community. Manny, an urban high school teacher, addressed this idea of bringing passive students to life through DV composing, concluding in his teacher inquiry that “integration of digital video validates the often marginalized ‘voice’ of the student, particularly and especially the urban student As a tool of validation, digital video allows students to be both creative and reflective in what they are producing.” Along with reading multicultural literatures, his students made a video to answer the question, “What is culture?” The complexity of the question became apparent as students narrated their diverse visual answers using artifacts and images and edited them into their DV: a Muslim girl sets down a prayer rug, an African American boy has the camera circle his braids, a girl shows a picture of her baby, as each also explains his/her perspective on culture. As in this instance, digital video publication (primarily screenings in a group, but also on the web) emerged as a meaningful sharing of student lifeworlds.

Dora found that her students developed new understandings of what they could do in DV composing and “flourished in their new roles. They were cinematographers, planners and directors who created new ways of being that made ‘students *directors* of their own learning.’” For students, creating such new roles through culturally meaningful activity is a process that mediates the construction of both identities and agency (Holland et al., 1998). As in prior research in CVCV project classrooms (Borowicz, 2005; Costello, 2006; Lauricella, 2006; Miller & Borowicz, 2005, 2006; Miller, in press), Dora found that students who were “not your typical good students found a voice with video production because there are many roles to fill . . . [digital video can] turn kids into archeologists, have them figure out what their peers want.” One of Dora’s students “had been floundering all year,” but digital video composing sparked a change: “What I saw happen to Justin was transformational. He was involved, initiated direction and wrote the entire script for his group’s movie.” When struggling students produced digital videos in their school contexts, they were sometimes re-positioned as “experts”—those whose attention was needed by other students and teachers to solve problems—thus challenging their school positioning as deficient.

Dora saw agency develop in her students, “[As] students make meaning and create understanding on their own, they turn the cameras on themselves. They tell their own stories, bear witness to other stories, talk to strangers and learn how to research.” With a hand-sized mini-DV camera and movie-making computer software, their stories became part of school.

In the last section, I examine how these components worked together to move Jackson to reframe his practice toward examining issues of power in reading and composing texts, that is, toward critical inquiry.

DV Attention to Perspectives and Critical Inquiry

A key element in literacy education is persuasion, which in digital video composing becomes a socially powerful practice in genres such as video editorials, uncommercials, and political ads. The experience of Jackson’s urban vocational class illustrates the power of digital video for learning persuasion *and* reframing literacy practices.

Jackson started with a problem he saw in his students: “I have trouble getting them to be persuasive and authentic. . . . Persuasive essays written by students reflect the fact-starved news reports of twenty-four hour cable news stations. They are more style than substance.” For his final project in the DV class, Jackson chose to introduce the uncommercial genre to his students to address what he saw as two neglected and “essential elements of savvy citizenry—media literacy and political/social awareness.” His senior class read short stories, studied the film *Bowling for Columbine*, and discussed issues and problems in society. They analyzed commercials, attending to the unifying concepts, persuasive techniques, and characteristics of the genre. Jackson also shared his DV class group’s own powerful uncommercial response to Marge Piercy’s poem “Barbie Doll.” The class discussed the impact of the DV and the design elements that contributed to its persuasive message about negative impacts of ads on female body image. (See the DV at http://s3.video.blip.tv/0230000250363/Cvcv-BarbieWorld_549.mov.)

In production teams, his students brainstormed, storyboarded, and “pitched” their concept to their teacher as producer. He was very pleased with the results: “I have never seen the level of involvement that I saw with this project. . . . This increased motivation manifests itself in such a way that only can be described as inquiry.” What Jackson named “inquiry” seemed to be a strong sense of communicative purpose for the video product that resulted in an intense flow experience in the process of DV design. Jackson noted that while “writing was individual, iMovie was community oriented.” The digital video inquiry required students to become collabora-

tive problem solvers for “how best to get the point across,” including conceptualizing their theme. They innovated, using what Jackson saw as “advanced problem solving methods of meaning making,” such as montage, skits, and statistics. For instance,

Another group dealing with the issue of suicide took the beginning of a music video, cut it up, and interspersed somber paintings by Salvador Dali and bleak lines from poems found in a poetry anthology Another group used toy army figures and positioned them to represent gang violence.

These visually persuasive methods took students way beyond “their standard five-paragraph essays.” Students dissatisfied with shots taken in school, met and filmed gravesites and streets signs in Buffalo’s most violent neighborhoods. In school, they recruited students from other classes who were dressed in black and white and filmed them standing up against the wall:

In the first shot, there were roughly fifteen students. In the second shot, there were eight. In the third, there were four. In the fourth shot, only one male student remained. When they got this footage back on the computer, they juxtaposed the shots of the decreasing male population with shots of the street signs and shots of the graves. The final product is somber, mesmerizing, and thought-provoking.

Clearly, these students were drawing on their lifeworlds as resources in their DV composing, but also critiquing those lifeworlds, reframing neighborhood identities, and using their collaborative work as a persuasive move aimed at change. The students in the group that produced this digital video had been graded at 52% the previous quarter. During the digital video unit, though, “They were the hardest working group in all of my classes. They developed and pitched a solid concept, kept a tight film schedule, and feverishly edited their product together. After two weeks, they had produced a superbly performed *Stop the Violence* commercial.”

As Jackson exported the student films, he had a moment of doubt, wondering why violence was so pervasive in their digital video products—why not pollution or drug abuse? But he thought he knew why: “They see violence all over. Our country invades Iraq. A former student is killed in action. A cousin is killed as a result of gang warfare. So is a brother. So is a friend.” And he knew that he succeeded in his goal of helping “give students the power to express themselves in a powerful me-

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dium about a societal issue *that was important to them, [to] manipulate the power utilized by corporations and government.*"

The following year Jackson introduced a social criticism unit to his 11th graders, during which they used a new genre he created called a "video quilt," comprised of one scene from each student, woven together. In black and white, each student in a close-up intoned a startling fact about the world revealed to them in their I-Search paper inquiries and provided an image to illustrate. In response to the overwhelming amassing of these problems and the faces of earnest young people saying these things, the final message filled the screen, white on black, "ACT!" (Access this video at <http://cityvoices.cityvisions.blogspot.com/2006/10/in-our-world-11th-grade-english.html>.)

In these explorations Jackson was seeking to expand student perspectives in a critical way: Jackson's students were drawing on literacy practices to help them make sense of world issues, and they were encouraged by their teacher to "make connections with academic literacies and to work toward empowered identity development and social transformation" (Morrell, 2004, p. 313). Integration of multimodal literacies into the lives and lifeworlds of adolescents in school has great potential to develop critical literacy among new generations of students.

Re-envisioning literacy as powerful and political for students became a long journey for Jackson. He read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970), *Savage Inequalities* (Kozol, 1992) and *Literacy with an Attitude* (Finn, 1999) in another class, books questioning the restrictive forms of literacy and learning that pass as education, especially for urban students like his. The impulse finally to make critical literacy happen for his students, I believe, arrived as he experienced the possibilities for critique in his own DV inquiries and saw in this multimodal literacy practice the potential for his students to do the same.

Conclusion

Teacher educators need to provide more embodied multimodal literacy practices and professionalizing tools that ELA teachers can use to become agents of change not only in their classrooms but in their schools and larger educational communities. Digital video composing CAN play a key role in those professional experiences and in transformations of literacy learning for students. If English educators are to teach with an eye on the future—a highly wired and visually sophisticated world—we must understand the growing need for new stances toward knowledge as *designed* and reconceptualize ELA teacher education to promote deep understanding and uses of these

digitally accessible multimodal literacy practices for knowledge-production in schools.

The limitations of these case studies demonstrated that not all teachers embraced change in just these ways. Some teachers were impeded by issues ranging from lack of equipment to rigid curricula. Most often, though, teachers found equipment they did not know existed in their schools and made spaces for a new composing tool for use with the existing curriculum. What I have found is that socially supported DV composing experiences can prompt English teachers to a new awareness of the social and cultural construction of literacy practices; of the importance of social, interactive aspects of learning; of the multimodal literacies students engage in outside of school that can serve as resources in school; of the pleasure in teaching engaged students through generative activities in DV workshops; and of identity-making as an essential component of literacy learning.

Some educators in school districts see DV composing as an example of technology infusion in classrooms, with the added benefit of student-produced DV products that have secondary use as curricular materials. I would not argue with this formulation, though I consider it a Trojan horse. Once DV composing is at work inside classrooms and schools with savvy teachers, what can happen is startling: merging curriculum with student lifeworlds, democratizing media production, repositioning students as competent, bridging from multimodal to academic *and* critical literacies. When students make a digital video

about a novel, they write about that novel in the timed writing situation of the New York State ELA exam and do well on the exam (Costello, 2006, McMaster, 2004). But they can also do so much more.

Others have studied and written about the power of digital video authoring that occurs among youth outside of schools (e.g., Goodman, 2003; Hull, 2003; Hull & Nelson, 2005). Taking this power into English teacher education (and professional development) so that it becomes a major composing tool of the English curriculum is the goal of the work that I have described. Teachers can use DV composing to create an alternative learning space INSIDE school and to move toward critically engaging issues of civic and social change, as in Jackson's classes. DV composing in teacher education and in the schools can be a tool for critique. It can transform urban and

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other students' sense of who they are in the world, of how they relate to people and to media/institutions/other world-shaping instruments.

With DV multimodal composing practices, teacher education potentially puts powerful tools of inquiry and attention-getting communication into the hands of teachers and their students. Such approaches can begin to change the educational ecology of schools and help prepare teachers and all students to participate critically in an increasingly *digital* democracy.

Notes

1. Multimodal Literacy Practice is a theoretical and pedagogical framework developed in the conversations of the New Literacies Group at the University at Buffalo (The State University of New York), particularly in collaboration with Mary Thompson, Fenice Boyd, and Mary McVee.

2. The City Voices, City Visions Digital Video Composing Project has been supported by funding from the Graduate School of Education at the University at Buffalo (The State University of New York), the Buffalo Public School District, the New York State Education Department, and the John R. Oishei Foundation.

3. Clip culture refers to an emergent new literacy, "an internet activity of sharing and viewing a short video." It was made possible by broadband networks, but has boomed since 2005 when websites for uploading clips emerged on the market, including Youtube, Google Video, MSN Video, and uthtv.com. Sources for clips include news, movies, music video and amateur video shot with DV, digital cameras, webcams and mobile phones. (Adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clip_culture.)

4. The inspiration for the "Uncommercial," developed by one of the CVCV teachers, came from the spoof ads popularized at <http://adbusters.org/spoofads/index.php>. The idea is to re-use visual and linguistic persuasive strategies to "sell" a different kind of concept, sometimes the opposite concept from the original. This kind of cultural re-mix is another popular literacy among adolescents.

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